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ABSTRACT

Despite a growing acknowledgement that the United States needs to invest more in the early care and education needs of children, the country lacks a common vision for a comprehensive approach to an early childhood care and education system. The Equal Access to Early Learning Conference, sponsored by the National Black Child Development Institute and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, was convened in 2001 to examine the critical elements necessary to provide access to early learning for all young children. This document summarizes the conference presentations related to the issues of meeting the critical early care and education needs of children, achieving quality, increasing access, overcoming barriers, and developing standards and assessment. The presentations were: (1) "The Goal of Voluntary Universal Early Care and Education" (Evelyn K. Moore); (2) "Findings of the Eager to Learn Project" (Barbara T. Bowman); (3) "Engaging Children's Minds: An Essential Element of Quality" (Lilian G. Katz); (4) "Utilizing the Head Start Model" (Ronald D. Herndon); (5) "Utilizing the Public School Model" (Don Bailey); (6) "Constructing an Integrated Program Approach" (Joan Lombardi); (7) "Diversifying Language and Culture" (Linda M. Espinosa); (8) "Financing Universal Pre-Kindergarten" (Sharon Lynn Kagan); (9) "Assessing Performance through Observation" (Samuel J. Meisels); and (10) "Closing the Achievement Gap" (Oscar A. Barbarin). The document includes case studies of individual projects and concludes with questions and answers on state initiatives. (KB)

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Equal Access to Early Learning

Cantigny Conference Report

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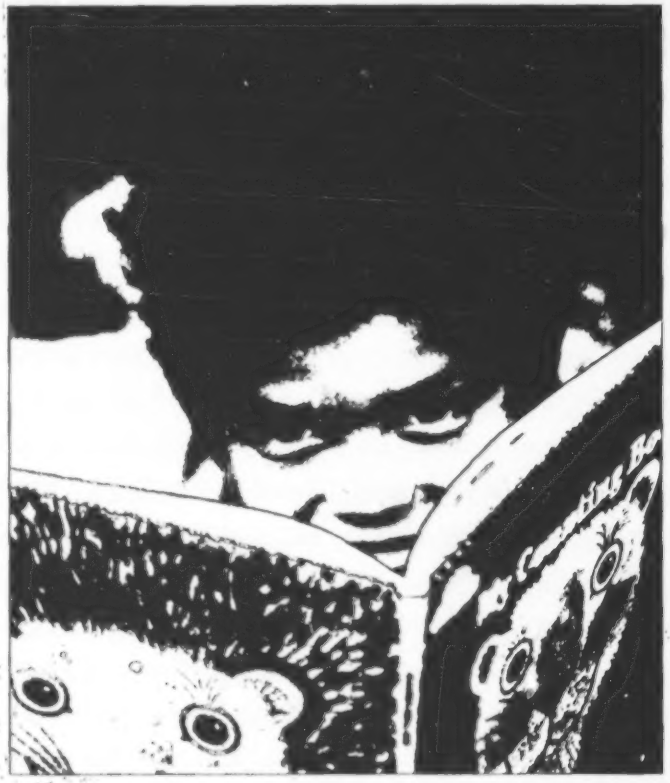

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The National Black Child Development Institute, Inc.

The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), founded in 1970, exists to improve and protect the quality of life of African American children and other children of color and their families.

From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NBCDI provides a national voice on children's issues, while a nationwide affiliate network provides direct services at the community level. NBCDI's programs of early intervention and prevention provide public awareness and training in the areas of early care and education, elementary and secondary education, child welfare, and health. NBCDI and its affiliate chapters serve as a resource to child care professionals, educators, parents, and all others working for and on behalf of children of color and their families, including 80,000 constituents who have an active role in the work of the institute.

The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation

The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation (MTF) was originally established as a charitable trust upon the death, in 1955, of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. McCormick played a major role in American journalism in the first half of the 20th century and built the Tribune Company from a single newspaper into a major media organization of newspapers, radio and TV stations, and newsprint manufactories.

McCormick provided considerable latitude in determining how his bequest would be distributed, specifying only that his monies be used for "religious, scientific, literary or educational purposes or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals." Since 1955, MTF's board of directors has periodically updated the foundation's giving guidelines to reflect a changing society, while following what they believe to be the wishes of the founder.

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Equal Access to Early Learning

Cantigny Conference Report

Cantigny, Colonel Robert R. McCormick's former estate in suburban Chicago, is a 500-acre public park and recreation area. It was left by Colonel McCormick "... for the recreation, instruction and welfare of the people of the state of Illinois."

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"Every child should have access to a quality early learning experience. This learning should embrace the integral relationship between social, emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual development."
— Evelyn K. Moore, President, National Black Child Development Institute

"Assuring all children are ready for school requires equal access to high quality early childhood programs."
— Richard Behrenhausen, President and CEO, McCormick Tribune Foundation

"High quality care and education offers critical support to working families and can enrich a child's early learning experience. Making it available for all children should be our goal."
— Dr. Wanda Y. Newell, Education Program Director, McCormick Tribune Foundation

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Introduction

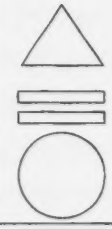
The science of early childhood and the changing social patterns of American families present a challenge to this nation's traditional arrangements for the care and nurturing of young children. The majority of mothers of children under five are in the paid workforce. Young children are served by a patchwork of child care settings that range in quality from harmful to exemplary, with the typical setting characterized by mediocrity. There is no comprehensive system for governance, oversight, data collection, regulation, training, compensation, or financing. At the same time, scientific study reveals the competency of very young children as learners who require rich and stimulating environments to aid the growth of their rapidly developing brains. There is an emerging consensus that very young children require early care and education structures that far exceed the services available today.

Despite the growing acknowledgement that our nation needs to invest more in the early care and education needs of children, we lack a common vision for a comprehensive approach to an early childhood system. The *Equal Access to Early Learning* conference was convened to examine the critical elements necessary to provide access to early learning for all of America's young children.

The *Equal Access to Early Learning* conference took place June 5-7, 2001, at Cantigny, the historic home of Col. Robert R. McCormick in suburban Chicago. The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) and the McCormick Tribune Foundation invited prominent experts in the areas of child development, education, psychology, social work, and public service. Presenters outlined the issues surrounding the question of how to provide equal access to early learning opportunities for all children in the United States. Participants—representing various disciplines—engaged in informative discussions, shared academic research, and suggested public policy strategies to ensure that all children have access to early care and education that is emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually stimulating.

Cantigny offered a perfect setting for conferees to address this important issue, which profoundly affects the development of America's citizens and communities. The McCormick Tribune Foundation funded the conference under the direction of its education program director, Dr. Wanda Y. Newell, as part of the foundation's prestigious Cantigny Conference Series.

Andrea Young
NBCDI Project Director



Conference

Presenters

Don Bailey

Don Bailey, Ph.D., is director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center and Professor of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has been at UNC since 1979 and has served as center director since 1992. His research and publications have addressed a variety of issues related to early intervention for children with disabilities and their families, with a particular focus on family support, inclusion, early identification, and program evaluation. He is the author of more than 120 journal articles, books, and chapters.

Oscar A. Barbarin

Oscar A. Barbarin, Ph.D., is the L. Richardson and Emily Preyer Bicentennial Distinguished Professor for Strengthening Families in the School of Social Work and fellow at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is president-elect of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, chair of the Black Caucus of the Society for Research in Child Development, and a fellow in APA's Division 27 Society for Community Research and Action. He is one of the senior researchers with the National Center for Early Learning and Development's study of quality and outcomes of early childhood programs.

Barbara T. Bowman

Barbara T. Bowman is a professor at Erikson Institute, where she teaches early childhood education and administration and supervises practice teachers in the areas of early education, cultural diversity, and education of at risk children. She is past president of Erikson Institute and was one of three faculty members who founded the institute in 1966. She is also a past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Linda M. Espinosa

Linda M. Espinosa, Ph.D., is currently an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Espinosa has served on the board for Project Construct and the Scholastic Early Childhood National Advisory Board, and is currently a member of the Head Start Technical Work Group on Child Outcomes. She is a consulting editor and book editor for *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* and is on the editorial board of *The Prevention Researcher*. Espinosa also has experience as a preschool teacher and school district administrator. Currently she is working on a school improvement project in inner city St. Louis.

Ronald D. Herndon

Ronald D. Herndon is chairman of the board of the National Head Start Association (NHSA). He serves as an ambassador representing the needs of the Head Start community to members of Congress, the Administration, and the general public. NHSA accomplishments under his leadership include major legislative gains, improvements in technology for Head Start parents and staff, establishment of important business partnerships, and maintenance of a sound financial base.

Since 1975, Herndon has been director of the Albina Head Start program in Portland, Oregon. He is a past president of the National Head Start Directors Association, past vice president of NHSA, an Outstanding METS Fellow, and a Johnson & Johnson Fellow.

Sharon Lynn Kagan

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D., is the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University and a senior research scientist at Yale University's Child Study Center.

Author of more than 100 articles and 12 books, Kagan's research focuses on the institutions and policies that impact child and family life. Kagan consults with numerous federal and state agencies, Congress, governors, and legislators. She is a member of 40 national boards and is immediate past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Lilian G. Katz

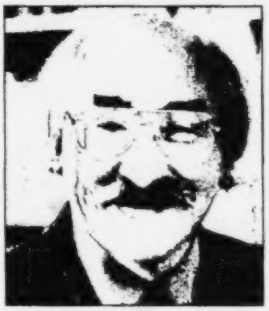
Lilian G. Katz, Ph.D., is professor emerita of Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) where she is also director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary & Early Childhood Education. She is a past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and is editor of the first online peer review early childhood journal, *Early Childhood Research & Practice*. She is currently chair of the editorial board of the *International Journal of the Early Years*, published in the United Kingdom. Her most recent book, coauthored with J. H. Helm, is *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years*.

Conference

Presenters

Joan Lombardi

Joan Lombardi, Ph.D., is the director of The Children's Project, a nonpartisan initiative to increase public, private, and civic investment in children and families. She served as the deputy assistant secretary for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and as the first associate commissioner of the Child Care Bureau. She administered the nation's largest child care program, the Child Care and Development Fund, and was instrumental in planning the White House Conference on Child Care and the President's 1998 Child Care Initiative.



Samuel J. Meisels

Samuel J. Meisels, Ph.D., is president of Erikson Institute in Chicago, Illinois. He was formerly a professor at the University of Michigan School of Education and a research scientist at the Center for Human Growth and Development.

Meisels is the coauthor of the *Work Sampling System: The Early Screening Inventory Revised* and *The Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention*, second edition. Meisels is president of the board of ZERO TO THREE: The National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families.

Evelyn K. Moore

Evelyn K. Moore is president of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), one of the nation's foremost organizations serving African American children and their families. She cofounded NBCDI in 1970 and is widely recognized for her visionary leadership of the organization. She currently serves on the boards of Child Trends, Inc., the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), and the Pampers Parenting Institute, and she is a commissioner for the Head Start Fellowship Program.

Wanda Y. Newell

Wanda Y. Newell, Ph.D., is Education Program Director for the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation. Newell previously served as the principal investigator and chief officer of the Montgomery office of the Alabama Child Care Quality Enhancement Consortium. She was responsible for creating and developing statewide quality child care initiatives and overseeing the development and implementation of a five-year strategic child care plan for the state of Alabama. Newell's academic training includes family systems, child development, parent-child relationships, ethnic diversity, child social competence, and early childhood education.

Representative Nan Rich

Nan Rich was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2000, where she is a member of the Child and Family Security, General Education, Banking, and Health and Human Services Appropriations Committees. She has been active in Broward County and served as the chair of the Broward School Readiness Coalition and the Children's Services Board. She also chaired the Government Affairs Committee for the Florida Association of Jewish Federations.

Nationally, Rich served as the board president of Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and as national president of the National Council of Jewish Women. Currently she serves on the board of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

Representative Georganna T. Sinkfield

Georganna T. Sinkfield was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1982. She chairs the Committee on Children and Youth and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Development, which oversees the budget for the Department of Human Resources, Juvenile Justice, Veterans Affairs, and Labor. Her other committee assignments include Banks and Banking and Appropriations. Sinkfield was elected as the first female chair of the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus (1993-1995).

Andrea Young

Andrea Young is the director of public policy for the National Black Child Development Institute. She has more than 20 years experience in law and public policy and has served as a legislative policy aide for Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and chief of staff to Representative Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), as well as a program director for the United Church of Christ and vice president for external affairs for Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington. As a staff member to Senator Kennedy, Young was instrumental in the passage of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday legislation. Young is the author of *Life Lessons My Mother Taught Me*.

The Goal of Voluntary Universal Early Care and Education

Evelyn K. Moore, *President, National Black Child Development Institute*

Each week nearly three-fourths of all children in the United States under the age of five receive some form of early care and education outside of the parental home. Settings include care in the home of a grandparent, some other relative, or an unrelated adult; center-based child care; preschool; pre-kindergarten in a public school setting; and Head Start. Formal programs, both public and private, are administered under a variety of auspices with varying levels of investment in the provision of educationally rich experiences.

With the exception of Head Start, no nationally mandated standards exist for early care and education programs. A teacher may have a graduate degree in early childhood education or be a high school dropout. In 30 states, there is no requirement that child care providers have training in child development. This diverse delivery system, absent national standards for program quality, health and safety, and professional development and training, has resulted in considerable imbalance among the nation's children in the level of readiness to receive and benefit from formal instruction.

Competing values and insufficient resources undermine efforts to extend quality early care and education to all children, particularly the most vulnerable. However, the traditional strong social value placed on young children being cared for at home by a parent, preferably their mother, is giving way to a growing acknowledgment of the benefits of early education. Currently, 42 states provide formal early learning programs to three- and four-year-olds, in addition to child care programs and Head Start. These initiatives are born of a recognition of the relationship between children's learning experiences from birth to age five and their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. The quality of a child's early care and education factors prominently in their preparedness for formal instruction and future academic performance.

Current investments in early care and education serve only a fraction of the children most vulnerable to school failure. Two major reports by the National Research Council, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* and *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* emphasize the importance and value of quality early learning experiences for children and the need to increase investments in this area. The science and the pedagogy are in accord: Every child should have access to quality early learning experiences.

Goal

Key Issues in Universal Early Care and Education

The Cantigny conference addressed the following critical issues and challenges:

- Content for quality programs
- Competing models and institutional interests for early learning programs
- Auspices and governance
- Social and cultural barriers to early learning opportunities
- Professional development
- Program standards and student assessment
- Political context and social values

Findings of the Eager to Learn Project

Barbara T. Bowman, *Professor and Past President, Erikson Institute*

The *Eager to Learn* report was commissioned by the National Research Council at the request of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and the Office of Special Education Programs, and with the additional support of the Spencer Foundation and the Foundation for Child Development. The council appointed a committee to study the care and education of children between the ages of two and five to determine how best to prepare young children to learn well in school, including the intellectual orientation, the social and emotional supports, and the content and methods that lead to school competence. The committee was to pay special attention to children at risk and produce a report that contained policy and research recommendations.

General Characteristics of Young Children

- Children have a natural inclination to learn. Even in early infancy, children are already trying to make sense out of the world. They are deeply involved in intellectual, emotional, and social interactions that frame their development.
- All young children are capable of understanding and actively building knowledge and there is a broad range of things children are capable of learning.
- Cognitive, social, emotional, and physical developments are complementary and mutually supportive areas of development.
- Young children need the attention and support of engaged, responsive, and knowledgeable adults in both home and school settings.

Characteristics of Effective Programs

- Children need experiences that provide opportunities to learn the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that underlie school achievement.
- The goal of a good pre-kindergarten program is to deepen children's knowledge and understanding of language, encourage representational and symbolic thought, and alert children to the world around them.
- Effective teaching and active learning occurs when teachers are able to link instruction to children's prior knowledge.
- Good teaching makes use of multiple teaching strategies. Although teaching needs to be intentional and have purpose, there is no one strategy by which all young children learn.
- Cultural and language differences as well as disabilities may affect school learning, but evidence shows that high quality programs can reduce or ameliorate children's developmental and/or educational disadvantages.
- Teachers with more education and specific training in early childhood pedagogy are more effective in promoting children's learning.

Needs

Major Recommendations

- Children should have access to a teacher with a bachelor's degree and specific training in early childhood care and education.
- Each state should develop program standards for early childhood programs and monitor their implementation.
- Teachers should have effective leadership, consultation, and support systems to strengthen their teaching.

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Engaging Children's Minds: An Essential Element of Quality

Lilian G. Katz, Ph.D., *Professor Emerita, Early Childhood Education and Co-Director, Eric Clearinghouse on Elementary & Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois*

Policymakers and educators have the responsibility to ensure the creation of safe environments that are stimulating, engaging, and informative. Because children are not all alike, a high quality preschool is one that recognizes and effectively addresses the variety of needs presented by a heterogeneous group of children. If, for example, the goal for a heterogeneous group of children is that all acquire reading and writing proficiency, i.e., a homogeneous goal, then educators must employ heterogeneous treatments or instructional strategies to achieve it. Furthermore, research studies outlined and summarized by Susan Goldbeck's "Instructional Models for Early Childhood: In Search of a Child-regulated/Teacher-guided Pedagogy"[1] show that although formal, scripted didactic instruction usually yields positive short-term outcomes, it may prove counterproductive in the long term. For example, the risk of early instruction in beginning reading skills is that the amount of drill and practice that is required for success at an early age seems to undermine children's disposition to be readers. It is clearly not useful for a child to learn skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost or damaged in some way. In the case of reading in particular, the development is most likely to be dependent on actual frequency of reading and not just on skill-based reading instruction.[2] All children should learn to read, not *just* to learn to read, but to become readers, ideally, lifelong readers.

The question of what should be learned must be addressed by all teachers at every level. Contemporary research confirms that young children learn most effectively when they are engaged in interactive rather than in merely receptive or passive activities.[3] Young children, therefore, are most likely to be strengthening their natural dispositions to learn when they are interacting with adults, peers, materials, and their surroundings in ways that help them make better and deeper sense of their own experience and environment.

A good curriculum or approach enables children to investigate and purposefully observe aspects of their environment worth learning about, and to record and represent their findings and observations through activities such as talking, painting, drawing, constructing, writing, and graphing.

Interaction that arises in the course of such activities provides contexts for much social and cognitive learning. One method of teaching is the project approach. Although project work is not new to early and elementary education, interest in involving younger children in group projects has been growing for the last 20 years.

[1] Goldbeck, S. L. (ed.), "Instructional Models for Early Childhood: In Search of a Child-regulated/Teacher-guided Pedagogy," *Psychological Perspectives on Early Childhood Education* (New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2000) pp. 3-34.

[2] Burns, M.S, Griffin, P. and Snow, C.E. (eds.), *Starting out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Prress, 1999).

[3] Bruner, J., Keynote Address, April 1999, in *Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Education* (pp. 9-18), a workshop sponsored by the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council, Washington, D.C., PS 027 463 and Wood, E. and Bennett, N., "Progression and Continuity in Early Childhood Education: Tensions and Contradictions," *International Journal of Early Years Education,* 1999, 7(1), pp. 5-16.

What Is a Project?

A project is an in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about. The investigation is usually undertaken by a small group of children within a class, sometimes by a whole class, and occasionally by an individual child. The key feature of a project is that it is a research effort deliberately focused on finding answers to questions about a topic posed either by the children, the teacher, or the teacher working with the children. The goal of a project is to learn more about the topic rather than to seek right answers to questions posed by the teacher.[4]

The Place of Project Work in the Curriculum

Advocates of the project approach do not suggest that project work should constitute the whole curriculum. Rather, they suggest that it is best seen as complementary to the more formal, systematic parts of the curriculum in the elementary grades, and to the more informal parts of the curriculum for younger children. Project work is not a separate subject, like mathematics; it provides a context for applying mathematical concepts and skills. Nor is project work an "add-on" to the basics; it should be treated as integral to all the other work included in the curriculum.

If we examine the complementary contributions of formal systematic instruction and project work, we can see how each contributes to children's learning of a wide range of knowledge, skills, and disposition. Systematic instruction contributes the following: (1) it helps children acquire skills; (2) it addresses deficiencies in children's learning; (3) it stresses extrinsic motivation; and (4) it allows teachers to direct the children's work, use their expertise, and specify the tasks that the children are expected to perform.

Project work, in contrast: (1) provides children with opportunities to apply skills learned through systematic instruction in ways that are purposeful in the eyes of the children themselves; (2) addresses children's proficiencies; (3) stresses intrinsic motivation; and (4) encourages children to determine what to work on and accepts them as experts about their needs.

Both systematic instruction and project work have an important place in the curriculum in the early years. For younger children, project work usually requires teacher guidance and consultation.[5]

[4] Katz, Lilian G. and Chard, Sylvia C., *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*, Second Ed. (Connecticut: Ablex Publishing Co., 2000) and Helm, Judith H. and Katz, Lilian G., *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

[5] Katz, Lilian G., "The Project Approach," ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Champaign, IL, 1994, EDO 97 PS 979, pp. 4-6.

A Project Case Study

The Community College/Auto Education Project

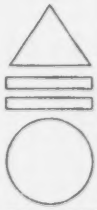
Following is an example of the application of the project approach. It was conducted by a head teacher, her staff, and student teachers at the campus preschool of the Illinois Valley Community College. The student teachers were learning how to engage young children in in-depth project work.[6] This automobile project is an example of what an intellectually engaging activity looks like for preschool-aged children. The success and execution of this type of project are dependent upon well-trained teachers and/or child care professionals who can ensure that the setting is safe for young children. In this case, every visit to the site and other field trips included no more than four or five children at a time, not only for pedagogical reasons, but also because of the high priority of safety concerns.

The investigation aspect of the project focused on encouraging children enrolled in a preschool program to explore the environment in and around their classroom, which included the laboratory adjacent to a building where automobile mechanics were trained. The supervisory teacher and her staff agreed to get the children involved in studying what the auto mechanics do and many other aspects of automobiles.

The children—boys and girls alike—became very animated in the initial discussion and quickly began to share what knowledge they already had of cars. They were then encouraged to explore the cars in the facility and to make careful observation of the automechanic trainees engaged in various repair processes. When the children were later asked to construct a list of everything they would need to build a car in their preschool classroom, they quickly became engaged in rich discussions and interactions with each other. The adults noted that the children's interaction was purposeful and meaningful.

In time, the experiment led to some unexpected developments that altered the group dynamics. For example, one child, who had been labeled the "oppositional child," based on his tendency to disagree with almost anything, began to experience a shift in his role in the peer group from opposing to supporting his peers' efforts. This child, who had become thoroughly intrigued with the cars, began to quiz other children about the uses for various car parts. He both sought and gave help as he became actively engaged in the process of building a car. One of the important outcomes of this learning experiment was that the children were able to employ successfully the kind of critical thinking skills so sought after in formal instruction.

Another one of the children, noticeably overlooked at the outset and whom the teachers hoped to involve more fully in the life of the class through his interest in cars, began to change in profound ways and began to develop relationships with his peers. The child's increasing social competence was accompanied by a transformation in his role in the peer group that led



[6] Beneke, Sallee, "Implementing the Project Approach in Part-Time Early Childhood Education Programs," *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, Spring 2000, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Champaign, IL., v2 n1, ED43857.

to an increased willingness to engage in other forms of learning. This child, along with others, began to display an extensive knowledge of cars. Later, the child's mother was filled with such pride that she brought a neighbor to the school and boasted of her son's contributions to the project. This experience transformed the boy's life in many, many ways, including his relationship with his mother.

This project underscores a crucial factor as related to early childhood education and assessment: Often, we don't know what children know because standardized tests do not always relate to their experiences. The project also employed what educators call emergent literacy, because, although the children had not been introduced to reading and writing in formal ways, they spontaneously asked for the assistance of the adults in helping them employ these skills. In the course of the project the children sought help with writing lists of automobile parts, conducting a study of nonmetal and metal automobile parts, and preparing graphs of the most popular colors of cars in the nearby parking lot.

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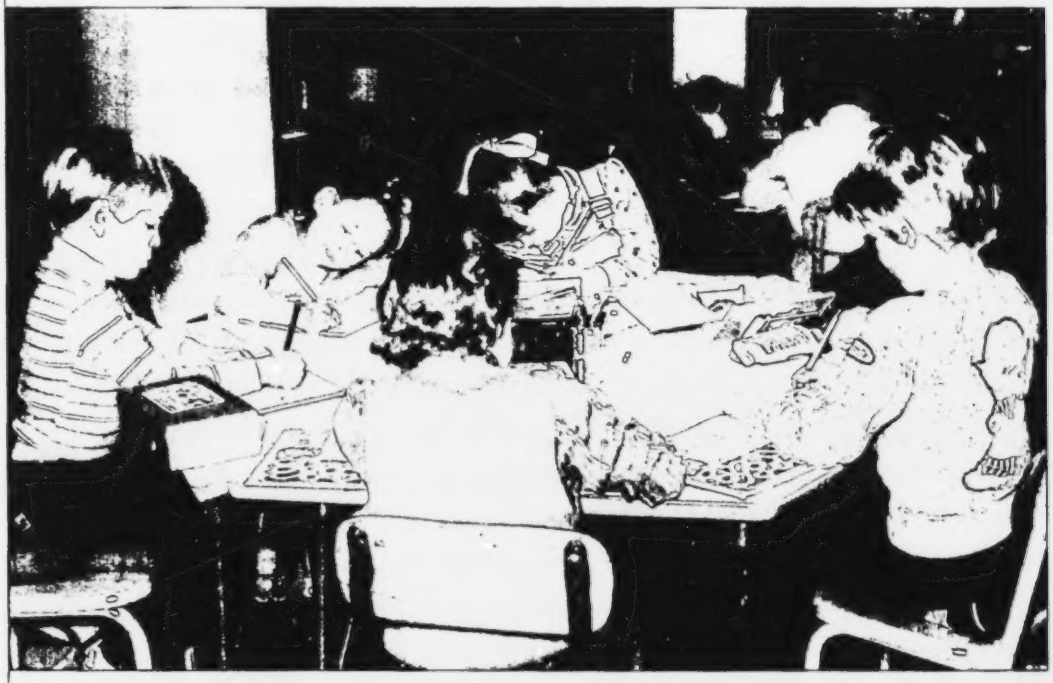
When young children are engaged in extended in-depth investigations in which they set out to find answers to their questions about phenomena and events in their own environment, their intellectual abilities are supported and strengthened. Their growing mastery of academic skills (e.g., literacy and numeracy) is used in the service of their intellectual engagement. Having the opportunity to use their growing academic skills purposefully as they report their findings also supports and strengthens their disposition to go on learning—a major goal of education at every level.

Utilizing the Head Start Model

***Ronald D. Herndon**, President, National Head Start Association*

The quality of child care and education programs administered to young children varies significantly, from children who have access to rich learning experiences to those who have very little access to the early education experiences necessary to prepare them for learning. Head Start was created in 1965 to address this concern. Since its founding, the program has provided comprehensive child development and family support services to millions of low-income preschool children and their families. Head Start has grown from a six-week summer program with a budget of $96 million to a nine-month school year program (a small number of programs now operate year round) with a nearly $5.3 billion allocation in fiscal year 2000.

Studies show that children who go through the program are healthier and enter school better prepared to learn. In addition, their families often remain engaged in educational processes longer than families who have not participated in the program. Unfortunately, Head Start only serves 40 percent of this nation's eligible children due to funding. In addition, the flawed definition of poverty used to determine eligibility excludes many needy children.



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Utilizing the Public School Model

***Don Bailey**, Ph.D., Director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center and Professor of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

There is significant debate and disagreement regarding auspice and universal early care and education programs. Three critical questions must be addressed during any debate of the issue:

1. What are the fundamental challenges that must be addressed in the area of quality and diversity of preschool education?
2. Under whose auspices can such a system operate effectively?
3. What are the key elements of a system of early education?

When considering the question of auspices and how a voluntary universal early care and education system could effectively operate, some experts believe that the public school system should be granted this level of auspice for the following reasons:

- The public schools are in the business of education and currently offer universal pre-kindergarten to three- and four-year-olds with disabilities. Therefore, it would be considerably easier to expand the current program than to establish educational services under another auspice.
- Child care agencies in general do not have the leadership, staff, or philosophical underpinnings to address the specific problem of school readiness. Moreover, school readiness has never been the overarching goal of most child care programs and to change that would require a major shift in child care philosophy and mission.
- The public schools have established statewide standards for teacher training, professional development, and compensation. In addition, assigning auspice to the public schools could positively impact many of the current problems in the child care profession such as poor training, insufficient compensation, and high staff turnover.
- There is no other child care and/or education agency with the same level of accountability.
- Public schools have a track record of merging local, state, and federal funds to create programs that offer a broader continuum of services for children.

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A Universal Access Case Study

The Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program

Following the discussion of public school auspices, a number of participants cited the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program as a model that funds classrooms under a variety of auspices.

The Georgia Pre-K program was established in 1993 to provide Georgia's four-year-old children with high-quality preschool experiences. Georgia is the only state in which all four-year-old children are eligible for services without reference to income or at risk status. The goal of every Georgia Pre-K classroom is to provide young children with the learning experiences they need in order to be ready for kindergarten.

According to Gary Henry, director of the Applied Research Center at Georgia State University, the state currently serves about 51 percent of its population of four-year-olds through the Pre-K program. Of the more than 121,500 children eligible, 62,500 are currently enrolled in the program. Approximately half of those enrolled would qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

The state estimates that when its program is combined with the federally funded Head Start program, approximately 70 percent of Georgia's four-year-olds will be participating in free preschool. However, program slots are offered on a first come, first served basis, and even these high rates of access are limited by funding levels.

Georgia Pre-K is funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education and is administered by the Office of School Readiness (OSR), which now includes administrative responsibility for Head Start. OSR contracts with providers, including private for-profit child care providers, school districts, and nonprofit providers, to administer an approved Pre-K curriculum. This mixed delivery system is popular with parents, allowing them some freedom to select the program of their choice. However, parents have no readily available measure of quality on which to base their selections. The potential for parents to choose providers based on factors such as convenience or homogeneous groupings due to lack of more measurable quality is a cause of concern. For example, in counties with high concentrations of African American residents, it appears that white parents are more likely to choose private providers than do white parents in areas that have a higher white population. Consequently, one of the effects of the parental choice policy may be that children are more likely to be enrolled in programs in which the children share similar ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Case Study

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Constructing an Integrated Program Approach

Joan Lombardi, Ph.D., Director of The Children's Project

One of the characteristics of early education in many other industrialized nations is the integration of child care and early education. Yet, historically, the United States has taken a two-track approach to this issue, with child care on one track and early education on another. In the 21st century, we have to design an early education system that integrates the goals inherent in care: supporting children while their parents work and taking advantage of the time spent in care to promote healthy child development.

In the next decade, we should support four key elements in an early education system:

1. **Direct investments in programs** in a wide variety of settings—Head Start, schools, child care. There should be a set of standards and teacher qualifications that guide program funding. Because these settings serve young children, they should reflect both the comfort of home and the stimulation found in traditional educational settings.
2. **Development of a community support system** that provides resources and referrals to parents, linkages to comprehensive services, family child care networks, and outreach to care by family, friends and neighbors.
3. **Expansion and improvement of child care assistance** that includes increasing resources to help families pay for extended hours of care and mechanisms to make these resources more accessible.
4. **Development of a professional preparation system** that includes building the capacity of higher education to prepare the early childhood workforce and improving the articulation across the various levels of preparation.

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Access

Challenges of Increasing Access

- Although they have the best intentions for children, public school administrators often lack expertise in the area of early childhood education and might prove ineffective if charged with expanding services to the nation's youngest and most vulnerable population.
- Public school auspices for voluntary universal pre-kindergarten will continue to be a tough sell among African American and Hispanic communities when the public schools are perceived as failing the population they currently serve. On the other hand, in some areas, minority families view the public schools as a vital community resource and would welcome an expansion of public education services to preschoolers.
- The legislative provisions for the various auspices for preschool care and education in the United States are ecumenical. These provisions do not prescribe service delivery by a single institution or structure.
- Existing programs cannot meet the need for access to preschool programs for all three- and four-year-olds. As access expands, there are roles for all the current providers such as community-based child care providers, the public schools, and Head Start.
- The auspice issue cannot be addressed effectively until the matter of financing is resolved. Without a finance plan, issues such as diverse delivery systems, governance, quality, standards, data collection, regulations, and facilities will remain.

Diversifying Language and Culture

Linda M. Espinosa, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Missouri

The nation's current child care and preschool programs—both public and private—fail to address the particular needs of its culturally and linguistically diverse population. This is evidenced in the unequal achievement and graduation rates between English language speakers and English language learners. To understand why our programs are not meeting the educational and social needs of children who are from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, we need to consider the following:

- Participation rates
- Program quality and appropriateness
- Home language and culture support
- The K-12 system as related to English language learners

Participation Rates

There are differential participation rates for organized child care and education programs based upon poverty levels, ethnicity, and language backgrounds. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that black children are more likely to be cared for in an organized setting than children in other groups. Hispanic/Latino families—even in nonpoor families—less frequently use formal child care or preschool services than any other ethnic or racial group at all income levels.

Research indicates a correlation between the quality of early childhood programs and family income, even within programs designed for low-income families. For example, programs that serve children from the lowest family income levels tend to be of lower quality than programs that serve relatively less poor families.

The problem is significantly compounded when language differences are factored into the equation. Programs that serve English language learners have fewer rich language interactions between teachers and children. This fact is reflected in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), a tool that measures the quality of classroom routines, teacher-child interactions, instruction, equipment, and staffing. The low ECERS ratings for programs that serve ethnically diverse groups may help to explain the low participation rates for these populations—perhaps, even more so than cost. For example, variations in quality in Head Start classrooms are significantly related to the socioeconomic characteristics of the communities that the programs serve. To what extent does participation rate relate to program quality? What issues are dissuading families from enrolling their children in preschool programs? Are families making decisions about whether or not to enroll their children because of quality issues?

Home Language Support

Researchers who have conducted ethnographic studies in diverse early childhood education classrooms note that children who do not speak the language of their teacher/instructor have fewer opportunities to engage in meaningful language interaction. When the teacher and the child do not share the same language, the teacher less frequently looks at, initiates a response from, or includes the child in a discussion. Although extensive research on ethnically diverse families and the kinds of language experiences these children are exposed to in early childhood is lacking, a body of research exists which suggests that programs offering home language support for non-English speaking families are useful in stimulating a child's language development and eventual English fluency.

The K-12 System and English Language Learners

The lukewarm support for preschool education among linguistic and ethnic minorities is related to the community's negative experiences with the K-12 public education system. Current graduation rates for Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic white children are 55 percent and 85 percent respectively. Clearly, a discrepancy exists between the experiences that children are having as they enter and progress through the public education system. If children are unable to engage in meaningful language interactions at an early age they are unlikely to foster a sense of belonging in the classroom. This sense of belonging and identity are critical for student success.

Cultural Considerations

Research findings indicate that in many Hispanic/Latino households, center-based child care is considered an invasion of the family. Participation rates for Hispanic/Latino children are reflective of a family-centered culture uncomfortable with formal instruction in early childhood. Although this could be valid under some circumstances, the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of programs often proves to be the determinant factor among Hispanic/Latino families.

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Challenges of Diversifying Language and Culture

- While linguistic and cultural diversity is a legitimate issue, it fails to register among those in early childhood education because of its political nature.
- Because early childhood education is not a highly salient issue to the American public and because salience drives policy, child advocates and educators will need to launch a public campaign in order to generate widespread support for early education initiatives.

Financing Universal Pre-Kindergarten

***Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D.**, Columbia University Center for Children and Familes and Yale University*

Each day, about 13 million preschool-aged children trot off to some form of early care and education setting. In many cases, these services are paid for in part or in total by governments—local, state, and federal. And where there are no public dollars, in large part, parents pay the cost of early care and education. Indeed, parents pay an estimated 60 percent of the costs of such services (Mitchell, Stoney, & Dichter, 2001)[7], a percentage that far, far outstrips other industrialized nations—the nations with which we are routinely compared on indicators that range from Gross Domestic Product to student performance.

Accepted as normative for decades in the United States, these realities are now being seriously questioned by scholars, policy makers, and parents. Why should it be that the schools attended by children five years of age and above receive public per pupil reimbursements that cover a large portion of children's education, while no such reimbursements are available to the educational settings that service children four years of age and below? Is this equitable? Why should it be that certain portions of America's most needy populations are eligible for reimbursements when children from families whose income is just a dollar higher remain ineligible? Often referred to as the "cliff" phenomenon, very needy children—by dint of miniscule increases in family income—fall from the heights of service eligibility to the depths of ineligibility with little ground in between. Like the inequity of who pays for services, a second inequity related to who receives services plagues American early care and education. The purpose of this brief discussion is to place the issue of inequitable financing squarely on the table, rightfully placed alongside other inequities being considered.

Is equality the same thing as equity?

For a long time, individuals concerned about the growth and development of young children focused on equality; that is, in order to help redress societal wrongs, in order to provide optimal learning situations for at-risk children, they needed to be afforded equal access to services. It was the access to the services—not necessarily the services themselves—that needed to be equal. Although America still has not achieved this goal, with the development of many state pre-kindergarten programs and with investments in early care and education soaring, service levels are increasing. The dilemma, however, is that equal access to services is only a starting point on the equity continuum … and it is not the same as access to equitable services.

Equity in service provision means that children who receive either full subsidies (as is the case in Head Start and many half-day pre-kindergarten programs) or partial subsidies are entitled to the same or higher quality of service that nonsubsidized children receive. In other words, in the case of early care and education, *equality* relates to access or the *quantity* of available services while *equity* relates to the *quality* of those services. These are two quite different constructs, both heavily contingent on the availability of resources.

[7] Mitchell, A., Stoney, L. and Dichter, H., *Financing Child Care in the United States.* (Kansas City, MO: Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2001).

Equality

Equality and equity: where are we?

If one examines policies made with regard to the care and education of America's youngest children over the past decade, we can see that equal access to services has been a primary policy goal. Fully aware of the benefits of early care and education, policy makers seem to understand that low-income children and children otherwise at risk should have equal access to services. We are moving on the equality agenda. Less clear, however, is policy makers' commitment to serving children equitably, and making all services of high quality. It should be noted that some at risk children do receive quality services. This, however, is not consistently the case, despite the admonitions of vociferous early care and education advocates. The equity side of the equation goes wanting, as does quality. The point is that unless services for young children are both available to all equally (as is the case with public education) and are of equitable quality, American children will not be fairly served.

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Financing Universal Pre-Kindergarten *(continued)*

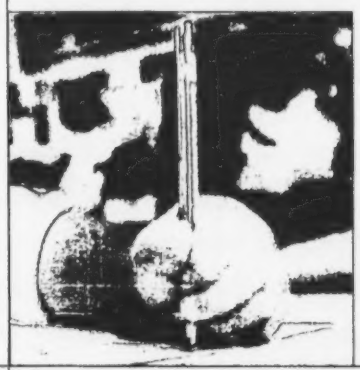
What does it cost to serve children with both equity and equality?

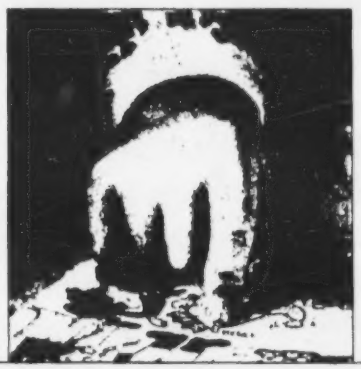
At the present time, the response to this question is not yet fully clear. First, very serious consideration must be given to the full costs of appropriate compensation for staff. Currently, costs are often determined without taking the foregone wages of practitioners into consideration.

Second, in order to determine costs accurately, it is necessary to consider not only direct services that children receive (the operations), but also the infrastructure that supports the operations. Infrastructure encompasses accountability, professional development, facilities, regulation, and data evaluation capacities. All too often, costs are calculated without factoring in these essential functions of the system.

Third, it is necessary to determine which kinds of financing mechanisms work best under which conditions. Tenacious questions must be addressed: Under what conditions do subsidies work best? Under what conditions and for whom do tax credits function most effectively? How durable are "sin" taxes and lotteries as sources of revenue? What does using "sin" taxes really say about the American commitment to the education of young children? What are effective financing models? Should we look to higher education, to public schools, to the health system as models? What are the comparative benefits of each? For which children? Under which conditions?

Although the answers to these questions are not, as yet, fully available, important work is going on that will effectively address them. That we as a field are now able to frame the questions, to partner with scholars from allied fields, and to learn from others' experiences is positive. Will it be soon enough to capitalize on policy makers' infatuation with the potency of the early years? Will it be soon enough to escape state budget deficits? No one can say. What we do know, however, is that without a focus on *equality* and on *equity*, no amount of funding will yield the kind of services we want for children and the kind of services this land of promise must promise its children.





Challenges of Financing Universal Pre-Kindergarten

- The following four principles pertaining to provider compensation may prove useful as educators and policymakers consider the program costs for universal preschool:
  1. Early care and education teachers require ongoing training and professional competence.
  2. Teachers with the same qualifications and experience should receive the same benefits and salary whether teaching in elementary schools or in early childhood programs.
  3. The staff compensation should vary by qualifications and degree of responsibility.
  4. Entry-level positions should be maintained so that qualifications do not become a barrier for individuals working in the field.
- Should preschool educators meet the same job requirements as elementary teachers? Will a college degree requirement prove prohibitive to the programs? There is a need for better, more qualified teachers, but establishing stricter requirements may create both barriers for workers currently in the field and funding problems as personnel become more valuable in the workforce. A possible solution to the problem could be a stratified compensation system that would require ongoing training and professional competence, i.e., teachers' salaries would vary based on qualifications and degree of responsibility.
- The public, while aware that universal preschool and child care programs will be costly, harbors unrealistic expectations about who will pay for the programs.
- Although public support exists for tax credits and personal choice, the public has yet to form a full picture about what it costs, what needs to be paid, and how it needs to be paid.
- Adequate consideration must be given to the political volatility surrounding early education initiatives and the need to ensure adequate levels of funding for these initiatives.

Assessing Performance Through Observation

Samuel J. Meisels, Ph.D., President, Erikson Institute, Chicago, Illinois

Assessment is best described as the process of obtaining information for the purpose of making evaluative judgments through systematic observation and analysis. It involves formulating questions, gathering information, sharing observations, and making interpretations in order to form new questions. The problem is that K-12 assessments have been "corrosive" because the system rarely employs those most familiar with a child's work—teachers—to make learning assessments. Thus, the resultant impact of assessments has been negative, and relatively little of it has moved us toward better teaching and enhanced learning.

Assessment need not be separate and/or hermetically sealed off from teaching and learning. In addition, it is not necessary for assessments to be done by an outside expert who is unfamiliar with the children and the classroom situation. Instead, assessments are best implemented by those individuals closely involved with children's lives. We can trust teachers' judgments and assume that observational methodology will be applied fairly if teachers are asked to address specific program, content, and performance standards.

Program Standards – Focus on aspects of classroom composition and structural elements of space, time, curriculum, and group size. The vast majority of standards that are of this type are represented by existing state standards concerning class size, teacher/child ratio, square footage per child, and a variety of other structural aspects.

Content Standards – Describe the general knowledge, skills, and competencies children are expected to demonstrate within a domain of mathematics, science, literacy, social studies, and any other area the stadards are intended to define. The problem associated with content standards is that they tend to be either too broad and do not provide adequate direction for implementers or they tend to be too specific and therefore do not provide enough flexibility for teachers.

Performance Standards – Provide concrete examples of competent skilled or knowledgeable behavior. They describe very specific behaviors and performances that children have to demonstrate in order to achieve at a specified level, and are often associated with a rubric or scoring framework that consists of a set of criteria for distinguishing among performances of variable competence. It is important to note that because two specific performance standards may dictate a curriculum or may interfere with a need to individualize and remain open to cultural variations, careful thought needs to be given to what these performance standards should look like.

Closing the Achievement Gap and Learning

***Oscar A. Barbarin, Ph.D.**, Professor, School of Social Work and*
Fellow, Frank Porter Graham Center, University of North Carolina

The overall goal and purpose is to use assessments to make the child more understandable and to engage in meaning making that will open doors to life long learning and untold potential. Standardized tests are frequently misused. Too often they are used for purposes for which they were not intended. A disconnect often exists between curriculum, standards, and the tests used to assess those standards. For example, tests developed to assess the mastery of one curriculum in reading or math may be used to test the efficacy of instruction in another curriculum. In such cases test results provide an invalid indicator of teaching and learning.

To close the achievement gap created by standardized tests, assessments must meet the following three criteria:

1. **Assessments should reflect the curriculum.** Any assessment, including standardized tests, should reflect the curriculum and the curriculum should reflect the standards. Children should not be assessed until it is possible to certify that they have been given an opportunity to learn the materials on which they are being tested.
2. **Assessments should be developmentally sensitive.** To meet a test of developmental sensitivity, test items should be screened to assure that they do not require or assume cognitive processing skills that are atypical for a given age group.
3. **Assessments must be culturally sensitive.** This is particularly true in the assessment of reading skills, though it applies to assessment of numeracy as well. Cultural insensitivity most often occurs in the form of assuming a uniformity of experiences and language. Current approaches to instruction and assessment of reading are ideally suited for children who have enjoyed the comforts, privileges, and experiences associated with middle-class life. However this is not the reality for a majority of non-native English speakers and African American children in the nation's public schools. Much of the literary materials relied upon by the schools for early instruction reading do not fully tap the life experiences these children are able to draw upon to give meaning to the materials read and samples used in assessment.

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Closing the Achievement Gap and Learning *(continued)*

Closing the Achievement Gap

In the absence of efforts to assess and promote socio-emotional competence, the achievement gap will persist. The risk of academic and socio-emotional difficulties is particularly acute for African American males (Barbarin, 1999)[8]. This may be due in part to the fact that African American males are more frequently subjected to disapproval and punitive sanctions in the classroom. They may internalize this disapproval in a way that is demoralizing and destructive of self-esteem and self-efficacy. As a consequence of how harshly the world sees and judges them, they may have difficulty forming a view of self as competent and worthwhile.

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[8] Barbarin, O., "Social Risks and Psychological Adjustment: A Comparison of African American and South African Children," *Child Development*, 1999, 70 1248-1359.

Challenges of Developing Standards and Assessments for Early Care and Education Programs

Standards and assessments are essential factors in early child care and education. Assessing the quality of early child care and education preschool programs is a daunting task for parents and educators. Following are some questions for parents and educators to consider when making program assessments:

- Does every child experience confidence in his or her intellectual capacity much of the time?
- Does every child experience what it feels like to understand some things in depth?
- Does every child experience what it feels like to apply his or her developing skills in purposeful and meaningful ways?
- Is every child intellectually engaged and challenged?
- Has every child had the experience of overcoming setbacks and obstacles?
- Does every child have a sense of belonging to the community?

Due to their inherent subjectivity, these questions result in an additional set of complex issues pertaining to assessment. However, this does not mean that efforts should be abandoned to develop and implement comprehensive assessment tools. Comprehensive assessment requires careful observation of children in various early childhood programs, as well as a complete review of traditional forms of assessments, such as standardized testing.

Rep. Nan Rich
Member of the Child and Family Security Committee of the Florida House of Representatives

Rep. Georganna T. Sinkfield
Chair of the Committee on Children and Youth of the Georgia House of Representatives

The greatest advances in expanding access to early education are occurring at the state level. The states have taken a variety of approaches, including North Carolina's Smart Start, targeted pre-kindergarten in New York, and universal pre-kindergarten in Georgia. Governors have initiated preschool programs to improve school readiness and ultimately the quality of the state's workforce. The leadership of governors has been key to the state initiatives, but governors require the support of the legislatures to support and fund their initiatives. Two state representatives provided insight into the decision-making processes in their states.

Q. *What are the promises and pitfalls of a state-by-state response to early care and education?*

Rep. Sinkfield: As a veteran member of the legislature, I have watched the 20-year process of increasing acceptability of statewide kindergarten and eventually pre-kindergarten in Georgia. Initially, there was resistance to Georgia's then-Governor Joe Frank Harris's efforts to introduce statewide kindergarten for five-year-olds. Harris acted in response to a class action lawsuit on behalf of the state's county schools charging that the state was not providing equal education to all Georgia students. But many people responded emotionally to the notion that children would be away from their mothers before the age of six.

Rep. Rich: Florida has been sited as a model for the nation by virtue of the 1999 School Readiness legislation, which contained quality initiatives in early education. However, in one vote, which took six minutes of debate, the 2001 legislature repealed statutes that governed critical components of the school readiness initiative. These included the state's Pre-Kindergarten Early Intervention Program, the portion of the Gold Seal Statute that provided for a tiered reimbursement system, observation and assessment of young children in subsidized child care programs, child to staff ratios, and more. All of these repeals jeopardize the quality of care especially for economically disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds.

Q. *What progress did you see over time?*

Rep. Sinkfield: In the 1990s, pre-kindergarten was introduced by Governor Zell Miller initially to improve educational performance among disadvantaged children. In contrast to the resistance to kindergarten, pre-kindergarten won wide acceptance and expanded quickly to provide access for all four-year-olds in the state.

Rep. Rich: Prior to the repeal, the pre-kindergarten model administered by Broward County Schools chose to require certified teachers in the classroom. The legislation helped to identify children at risk of developmental delays and linked them to services. Without that early intervention, school districts will have to bear greater costs for special education and remediation.

Perspective

Where did the funding come from?

Rep. Sinkfield: The implementation of the Georgia statewide lottery was key to securing both the funding and the political commitment for statewide preschool.

Where will the state of Florida go from here?

Rep. Nan Rich: Support for preschool is difficult to build and gains can be lost quickly. With the repeal of many Florida school readiness statutes, the legislature is abdicating its responsibility for ensuring educational quality, for establishing and maintaining standards, and for monitoring implementation. Florida has developed a statewide structure that has put into place 57 "readiness coalitions," which are helping to establish county programs and policies for young children. The legislature needs to remain committed to its implementation.

What advice would you give to advocates who are trying to enlist their states' support for voluntary universal early education?

Rep. Sinkfield: The engagement of advocates is important to maintain quality and fairness in the implementation of the preschool initiative. Even with the governor's support on early education, lobbying remains both central and critical to the process. It's very important that you build relationships with legislators. There are three or four key people whose knowledge I trust. In the intensity of a legislative session, trust and relationships can make the difference between success and failure.

Rep. Rich: Involvement of parents, providers, and the business community is important to successful advocacy on behalf of early education and to passing legislation that can assure quality as well as withstand the winds of changing administrations.

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Conclusion

Early education for young children continues to gain momentum as a priority on our nation's education agenda. The Cantigny conference convened many of the country's leading early education experts. Critical issues that were identified included the need for quality delivery systems, appropriate standards and assessments, structured auspices, including appropriate financial supports, and curriculum that are culturally inclusive. NBCDI will continue to build upon this collective work and the issues and challenges it presents.

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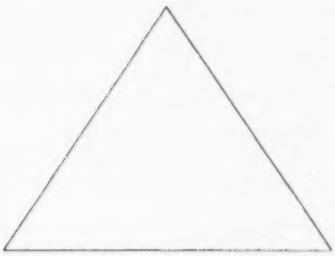

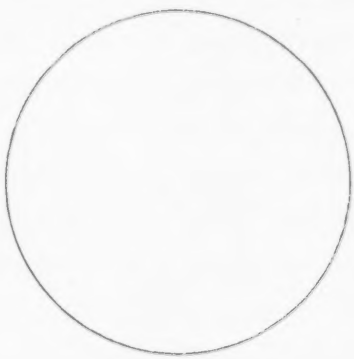

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